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News Release

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EPA Releases Air Sampling Data

EPA, in coordination with Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, collected air screening samples from multiple locations across the New Orleans metropolitan area on September 11 and 13-19, 2005.

Because samples were not collected with standard monitors, the mix of particles in the screening samples cannot easily be compared to EPA's standards. However, to provide the public with a point of reference, EPA has compared the results to its Air Quality Index (AQI) for inhalable coarse particles, also known as PM 10.

The AQI is an index of daily air quality that focuses on health effects that the public may experience in a few hours or days after breathing the air. The screening samples show particle pollution at levels considered moderate or "code yellow" under the coarse particle AQI on September 13, 14, 18 and 19.

Coarse particle pollution is considered "moderate" when the 24-hour average level is between 55 and 154 micrograms per cubic meter of air. At these levels, unusually sensitive people should consider not engaging in vigorous exercise. For more information, see "Particle Pollution and Your Health," <http://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=particle.cover> From 1999 to 2004, New Orleans averaged three "moderate" PM 10 days a year, based on measurements taken every six days.

These newly-collected data were taken using a portable, battery-powered monitor that often is used in emergency response situations, because it gives immediate readings. EPA does not use data from these types of monitors either for compliance purposes or for generating routine air quality advisories.

These initial results represent the beginning of extensive sampling efforts and do not represent all air conditions throughout the area. As this is a dynamic situation, general conclusions should not be made regarding air quality based on results from this snapshot of data. For sampling information, go to:
<http://www.epa.gov/katrina/testresults/air/dataram.html>